



A movable mill

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Middletown's vagrant windmill, the Sherman Mill, is back in operation.

We don't mean to be dismissive, but the windmill has spent two centuries wandering around, and today may be deemed to be without steady employment. Even though it's returned to working order -- thanks to windmill doctor Andy Shrake and a 2002 grant to the Newport Restoration Foundation from a Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission bond -- the Sherman Mill won't be turning wind into energy.

Historically, the work of windmills was so valuable that it was common to move them to where the market was most lucrative -- mainly, areas without sources of water power. The Sherman Mill was built in Warren for the distillery trade, lifting granite millstones to grind grain. In the 1830s it was moved to Fall River, and in 1860 Robert Sherman acquired it and moved it to Portsmouth. There, in the early 1900s, it went from East Main Road to West Main Road. And then, rendered obsolete by electrical power, it joined the many other mills on the unemployment line after 1920. In 1969, the Sherman Mill was donated to the Newport Restoration Foundation and moved to the Prescott Farm, in Middletown.

Windmill Doctor Shrake has worked on all three of Rhode Island's surviving historic windmills (in the early 19th Century at least 17 dotted the Aquidneck Island hills). The Jamestown Windmill, which he fixed in 2000, when it was 213 years old, was the first he'd ever worked on that stood on its original site. The Sherman Mill may not be as old, but it has clearly seen more of the world.

Now it's time for the world to come see the mill. Children especially will delight in its newly revolving sails. Mr. Shrake and the Newport Restoration Foundation deserve commendation for giving new life to the old Sherman Mill -- which we hope will stick around for a while.

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